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on Friday, 19 July 1996, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. RIVA (Argentina)
(Vice-President)

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In the absence of Mr. Gervais (Côte d'Ivoire), Mr. Riva (Argentina), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

SOCIAL, HUMANITARIAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS: REPORTS OF SUBSIDIARY BODIES, CONFERENCES AND RELATED QUESTIONS (continued) (A/51/203-E/1996/86)

(a) SPECIAL ECONOMIC, HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE (continued) (E/1996/65, A/51/172-E/1996/77)

(i) UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (continued) (E/1996/52 and Corr.1)

Mr. MARRERO (United States of America), speaking on the question of humanitarian assistance, expressed his Government's strong support for the work of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and emphasized that humanitarian assistance must be effective, efficient and well-coordinated. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the humanitarian agencies had the potential, in their work to implement Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56, to lay the foundation for action in many key areas, including assistance to internally displaced persons, prevention of complex humanitarian disasters and the relationship of emergency assistance to development programmes.

The Department should draw up a plan for consultation with Governments regarding the forthcoming analysis of the capacity of the United Nations system for humanitarian assistance, in order to ensure that the Council would be in a position in 1997 to act on recommendations for change that might emerge from the analysis. His delegation congratulated the operational agencies for the progress they had made thus far in defining their roles in the areas set forth in Council resolution 1995/56.

An important example of the Department's coordination role was its Military and Civil Defence Unit, which would develop specific ways for national military and civil defence organizations to best support humanitarian programmes in dire emergencies. His delegation encouraged the operational agencies to make use of the Unit - to which his Government had contributed $150,000 - as a planning and evaluation body.

The Department also should enhance the consultative nature of its preparations for meetings of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee with a view to improving the Committee's utility as a forum for decision-making on humanitarian issues. Further, the Department should ensure that the improved coordination at Headquarters between it and other United Nations departments - which his delegation welcomed - was reflected in operations in the field. The lead agency concept merited consideration in that context.

With regard to economic sanctions, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs need not report the fact that sanctions had a real economic impact on people and Governments; rather, its role must be to demonstrate leadership in ensuring that exceptions to sanctions were used to mitigate hardships endured by people who suffered because their Governments had, for good reason, been isolated through sanctions. That must be accomplished without undercutting the objectives the sanctions regimes were intended to serve. For example, the Department must ensure that humanitarian distributions undertaken pursuant to Security Council resolution 986 (1995) proceeded in a manner consistent with the intent of the resolution. It must be vigilant in its observation of the resolution's implementation in central and southern Iraq. Sound judgement in the development of activities funded pursuant to the resolution in northern Iraq was also essential.

His delegation supported the Department's coordination of demining efforts, particularly, in respect of the landmine database, and the Department's assumption of the management of the Mine Action Centre in Bosnia. The international community must continue closely to cooperate with the Department on global demining issues.

His delegation continued to believe that there was insufficient justification for expanding the scope of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund. Where legitimate need for an activity existed, donors would respond through existing funding mechanisms, primarily through the operational humanitarian agencies.

Mr. MEKDAD (Observer for the Syrian Arab Republic) said that with the assistance of the international community, Lebanon had entered a new era of reconstruction and development. The report of the Secretary-General (E/1996/65) contained an excellent analysis of the very serious consequences of Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon and its continuing attacks on that part of the

country, in particular in April 1996. The attacks, inter alia, on the infrastructure of the country, hindered the reconstruction efforts which were under way. Moreover, Israel continued to disregard Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and to flout the principle of "land for peace".

His country had always supported Lebanon and called on Governments and organizations to provide it with generous assistance. His delegation commended Lebanon on its own reconstruction efforts and welcomed the support provided by the United Nations, to specialized agencies and Governments.

A well-defined mechanism for the reconstruction of Lebanon that was responsive to the needs established by the Lebanese Government was required. The unconditional withdrawal of Israel from Lebanese territory pursuant to Security Council resolution 425 (1978) was also vital for peace and progress in Lebanon.

Mr. CHINWANNO (Thailand), referring to the report of the Secretary-General contained in document E/1996/77, said that the review process undertaken by UNICEF, UNHCR, UNDP, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) was welcome, and his delegation looked forward to the comprehensive report on the review of the capacity of the United Nations system for humanitarian assistance to be submitted to the Council in 1997.

It was important to ensure the coordination, at Headquarters and in the field, of the response of the various humanitarian and development agencies to emergencies, in particular, in addressing the continuum of relief operations, rehabilitation and development. He underscored the value of the central coordinating role of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, the work of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and memoranda of understanding between various agencies. Efforts should continue to help strengthen local capacities for disaster preparedness and response to mitigate the impact of emergencies on affected populations.

With regard to prevention strategies, greater resources must be committed to promote sustainable development, poverty alleviation and the reduction of economic and social disparities, which were major causes not only of political tensions and conflicts, but also of environmental degradation and natural disasters. He commended the Department of Humanitarian Affairs for its emergency response at the onset of natural disasters, in mobilizing

international assistance and coordinating international relief. In keeping with its humanitarian tradition, his country would continue, within the limits of its resources, to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to affected countries, bilaterally or through international organizations.

Mr. GORELIK (Russian Federation) said that his delegation was very concerned about the persistent need for humanitarian assistance, donor fatigue, the uneven attention focused on different countries, regions and operations, and shrinking supplies of food aid. Consolidated inter-agency appeals remained an effective means of mobilizing resources, although it was true that the level of response by the international community needed to be increased and equalized across all humanitarian operations. He welcomed the efforts to establish clearer priorities in those appeals.

The report in document E/1996/77 rightly stressed the need to link emergency assistance with reconstruction and development, particularly in the context of funding arrangements. Inter-agency appeals must be coordinated with round-table meetings and consultative groups, and it was to be hoped that practical proposals would be made in that regard. His delegation agreed that in recent years the coordination of humanitarian assistance had been considerably strengthened, especially at the headquarters level, and welcomed the growing practice of memoranda of understanding being concluded between major United Nations agencies participating in humanitarian operations. It was important to establish standby arrangements with external donors to provide increased emergency assistance at times of special need. His delegation supported the use of service packages to mobilize assets from donor countries.

Regarding capacity restraints and limitations of the United Nations humanitarian system (section III.C), his delegation believed that the issues were not all equally complicated and that, in particular, the issues of coordination, staff development, and monitoring and evaluation could be dealt with more speedily. As to resource mobilization, his delegation hoped that the work of the sub-working group on resource mobilization would help in better evaluating assistance and national assets and services provided for humanitarian operations. Special emphasis should be given to post-conflict peace-building, which integrated relief and development. There must be proper coordination of the efforts and programmes of all those involved, including United Nations operational agencies, the Bretton Woods institutions and humanitarian agencies.

With regard to the operation of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund, his delegation felt that in exceptional cases the channelling of the Fund's resources to finance protracted emergencies could be justified in order to ensure the survival of a humanitarian operation. The Council could recommend such authorization, subject to certain criteria. His delegation wished to know when the Humanitarian Early Warning System would become fully operational.

A strategy needed to be worked out after reviewing current institutional arrangements, as mentioned in paragraph 108 of the report, and taking into account the four major weaknesses referred to in paragraphs 110 to 113. His delegation hoped that the Department of Humanitarian Affairs would be able to provide suggestions in that regard, since it was important to draw on the Department's unique potential.

In 1995-1996 the Ministry for Emergencies of the Russian Federation had provided emergency humanitarian relief to 18 countries for a total of $20 million.

Mr. KAID (Observer for Yemen) expressed his country's appreciation for the assistance provided to it by the United Nations and its specialized agencies and donor countries for the reconstruction of his country. Its infrastructure had been seriously damaged by war, and torrential rains had caused many casualties and destroyed many homes. His country required additional assistance from the international community to confront the difficulties which it faced.

His Government was pursuing the process of democratization and development and had made considerable progress in restructuring various sectors of the economy. In addition, a special tribunal had been established to bring persons accused of corruption to justice.

Mr. DONOKUSUMO (Indonesia) said that his delegation agreed in general with the context for humanitarian assistance described in the report of the Secretary-General (E/1996/77). His delegation was particularly concerned that, at a time when official development assistance had stagnated, donor countries were not adequately responding to United Nations consolidated appeals for humanitarian assistance. Although the adoption of General Assembly resolution 46/182 and Council resolution 1995/56 had led to greater coordination and rationalization of resources, further efforts to achieve those goals must be made. The long-term solution to humanitarian crises lay in the sustained and

sustainable development of developing countries. Funding for humanitarian assistance should not be provided at the expense of development assistance.

His delegation agreed that relief, rehabilitation and development were closely intertwined and that development issues should be addressed even as relief activities were under way. Capacity-building and development programmes were central to addressing the root causes of certain humanitarian crises and helped to reduce the vulnerability of affected populations. The participation of the World Bank in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee would further strengthen the efforts of the United Nations to address crises in a holistic manner, and his delegation also welcomed the measures being taken by UNDP, UNICEF and UNHCR in that connection. It also welcomed the UNHCR work on international protection.

His delegation looked forward to the review of funding arrangements for relief and development activities to be carried out by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee working group and by the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions of the Administrative Committee on Coordination. Given the need to improve the coordination of relief activities at the field level, his delegation looked forward to the report comparing the resident coordinator system with the lead agency arrangement, since it saw merit in both options. It also looked forward to the evaluation to be performed by the sub-working group on coordination and hoped that the more efficient utilization of resources would encourage adequate and timely funding arrangements. The sub-working group on monitoring and evaluation should recommend a workable system for the coherent monitoring of United Nations activities in emergency situations.

His delegation hoped that the establishment of a financial strategy for addressing the extrabudgetary requirements of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs would ensure predictable resources for long-term activities. There was a continuing need to address problems arising from the imbalance in the Department's regular and extrabudgetary resources. The Council should recommend measures to strengthen the Central Emergency Revolving Fund and ensure its effectiveness as a borrowing facility and as an instrument for emergency responses. Additional measures should be taken to ensure the availability of adequate resources for protracted emergencies.

Turning to the refugee situation in South-East Asia, he said that his delegation was grateful to UNHCR for the assistance rendered under the

Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees. UNHCR must continue to meet its responsibilities with respect to reintegration and monitoring activities. He was confident that with the support and cooperation of all concerned that function would be discharged successfully.

In conclusion, he said that his delegation welcomed the efforts under way or planned to enhance the operations of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in emergency humanitarian relief efforts in general. It was imperative that the international community should maintain its commitment not only to short-term alleviation and relief measures but also to the mitigation of protracted humanitarian emergencies.

Mr. ANDREASSEN (Observer for Norway) expressed his delegation's satisfaction with the report of the Secretary-General in document E/1996/77 and underscored the importance of the work of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the critical role of the Emergency Relief Coordinator. The complex activity of responding to disasters and emergencies required an ongoing evaluation of existing mechanisms, and his delegation was pleased that the Department was committed to that process, in which the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality were prime. The Department, as the provider of support and essential services to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, should be strengthened. The sub-working groups of that Committee had important work to do in that regard.

On the question of funding, his country, as a major contributor, encouraged others to respond favourably to the consolidated inter-agency appeals process in order to enhance international burden-sharing. In preparing appeals, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs should continue to involve non-governmental organizations, and the appeals should reflect the continuum from prevention to long-term rehabilitation and development. The Central Emergency Revolving Fund, which his country continued to support, was a useful tool in facilitating a rapid response in the initial stages of emergencies.

He underscored the critical role of the Department of Humanitarian Assistance with respect to coordination in the field. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee should devise a system for scenario planning, including efforts to clarify the comparative advantages of its members and establish a division of labour. Situation-based solutions, rather than a standard approach, were

required. His country had developed a highly effective emergency response system.

The Department of Humanitarian Affairs should play a key role in the collation, analysis and dissemination of relevant information in a standardized manner, and its analytical capacity should be strengthened to that end. The Integrated Regional Information Network at Nairobi represented a positive step in that direction. His Government continued to support the valuable operational role of the Department as the United Nations focal point for demining issues and as the administrator of the voluntary trust fund for assistance in mine clearance. His delegation was concerned about the financial situation of the Department and believed that a substantially larger share of its operating resources should be provided from the regular United Nations budget. The Department should look critically at its activities and focus on its priority areas of work.

His delegation urged the United Nations to strengthen its efforts to ensure the safety of relief personnel. It underscored the importance of a timely conclusion of the work of the governing bodies of relevant United Nations organizations pursuant to paragraph 2 (b) of Council resolution 1995/56, with a view to consideration by the Council of the comprehensive and analytical report called for in that resolution.

Ms. SAIGA (Japan) said it was essential that the international humanitarian assistance community should strengthen the linkage between relief operations and rehabilitation and development activities. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee provided an appropriate forum for fostering coordination among humanitarian and development assistance agencies even before ceasefires were achieved. Her delegation fully supported the Committee's efforts to review possible modalities for associating the World Bank with its work. It welcomed the recent decision to allocate a portion of the UNDP core fund to countries in special development situations, although the details of that new arrangement should be reviewed thoroughly by the Committee. Although it was important to involve development assistance agencies at an early stage, humanitarian assistance agencies also played an important role as catalysts for rehabilitation and development; the quick-impact projects of UNHCR were most welcome.

Her delegation welcomed the willingness of UNHCR to respond to requests for assistance to internally displaced persons but, considering the heavy burden it was already shouldering, felt that its mandate should not be expanded to cover that function. Each humanitarian assistance agency involved with internally displaced persons should act on the basis of its own mandate and expertise, while maintaining proper coordination in order to ensure the effectiveness of the overall effort.

With regard to coordination in complex emergencies, it was important to strengthen the capacity of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs as the central coordination body, through such measures as active utilization of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and an improved consolidated inter-agency appeals process. Her delegation also supported the efforts of the Department to obtain a larger allocation from the regular budget and to streamline and rationalize its organization and work. At the field level, coordination could be maintained most effectively by a regional humanitarian coordinator. Her delegation welcomed the practice of concluding memoranda of understanding.

The Central Emergency Revolving Fund had been an effective instrument in enabling United Nations agencies to respond to emergencies in a timely manner. However, the Fund should not be used for protracted emergencies, since its main purpose was to ensure a timely response in the initial phase of an emergency. There was no urgent need to expand the Fund at the current stage, since the Fund balance was at a satisfactory level.

Ms. HAMILTON (Australia) said that Australia supported efforts to strengthen the coordination of United Nations emergency humanitarian assistance and was in favour of an effective coordinating role for the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. It stressed the need for all United Nations agencies to develop strategies to apply their individual resources and strengths to the common goal of more effective coordination of humanitarian assistance. Governments had a role in enhancing coordination by providing coherent direction to the various parts of the United Nations system. Australia was especially interested in ascertaining how coordination worked in relation to internally displaced persons and mine-clearance and how adequate and stable funding for coordinated United Nations humanitarian assistance could be maintained. The transition from a complex emergency phase to development assistance was also important.

Her delegation supported the comments made by Ireland, on behalf of the European Union, and by Norway regarding the protection of humanitarian workers.

Mr. TENNE (Observer for Israel), referring to the report on assistance for the reconstruction and development of Lebanon (E/1996/65), said that the report described in great detail the damage inflicted on Lebanon during the conflict in April 1996 and also quoted unnamed "officials" who blamed Israel for deliberately inflicting the damage. However, there was no allusion to the actual cause of the hostilities: the unprovoked and unhindered wave of terrorist missile attacks from Lebanese territory against the civilian population of northern Israel and the resultant economic and physical damage, as well as loss of life. The report also omitted mention of the strenuous Israeli efforts to reach an understanding that would end those attacks and the fact that Israel had been left with no alternative but to defend itself.

Israel, as always, was ready to negotiate peace with Lebanon; it had no claim on Lebanese territory, economy or security. However, Israel's right to its security and inviolability must be respected.

Mr. SINGH (India) said that too little attention was being accorded to natural disasters as compared with other kinds of crises, and more work needed to be done to assess the extent to which natural disasters caused damage in developing countries and whether they were receiving enough international funding. In responding to humanitarian crises and natural disasters, efforts must be made to strengthen national capacity, instead of relying on skills from abroad, so as to enable countries to tackle problems more effectively in the long term. South-South cooperation must be enhanced, and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs should pay more attention to the kind of facilities and expertise available in countries undergoing emergency situations.

There should be greater transparency in the allocation of fund resources. His delegation was concerned about the extent to which humanitarian aid was diverting resources from development; that issue must be kept in mind.

Mrs. MAAZA BEKELE (World Health Organization (WHO)) said that the World Health Assembly, at its forty-ninth session in May 1996, had endorsed five major fields of activity for WHO: technical support for emergency humanitarian assistance; emergency preparedness and the development of national capacity for emergency health management; rehabilitation of national health structures and the linking of relief and development activity; humanitarian advocacy; and

enhanced partnership with national, international, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. WHO had made considerable progress in responding to health needs arising from such emergencies; however, WHO member States had emphasized that natural disaster prevention and mitigation were as important as coping with the impact of man-made emergency situations and had also stressed that WHO was primarily a technical, not a relief agency.

Cooperation between WHO headquarters and its regional offices had been significantly strengthened. Technical assistance was increasingly made available to field offices, including specialized medical equipment, communications and logistic equipment, and personnel. Emergency staff were made available through short-term contracting or through collaborating arrangements with emergency response organizations; the goal was to have on standby a number of trained persons familiar with the work of WHO.

Work was in progress on memoranda of understanding with UNICEF and UNHCR. Emergencies of a purely public health nature, however, were handled directly by WHO. Since the resources of WHO were not primarily directed to relief operations, WHO depended on appeals by the Department of Humanitarian Assistance, and the funds often arrived too late. The World Health Assembly had therefore called on WHO to mobilize the relatively limited resources required to firm up its emergency response capacity.

Ms. LEU (Observer for Switzerland) said that the capacity of the United Nations to respond to humanitarian emergencies depended to a large degree on how efficiently each United Nations agency worked and how well they operated together. Her delegation looked forward to the comprehensive analytical report which the Secretary-General would submit to the Council. One of its results should be a more clear-cut definition of roles within the United Nations system that also took into account the mandates of major non-United Nations actors such as the International Committee of the Red Cross. Her delegation was in favour of "multi-track" assistance, consisting of enhanced cooperation and coordination among humanitarian actors, integrating all tools available in complex emergencies.

Her delegation noted with satisfaction the progress made by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in implementation of General Assembly resolution 46/182 and noted that it was the only Department in the Secretariat to have undergone a strategic planning exercise and an independent management study. Her delegation

believed that the Department had a unique and central role to play in the coordination of humanitarian assistance and must be provided with the necessary tools, including a proper management structure, adequate staffing, a sound financial basis and some certainty about its future. Switzerland would continue to support the Department, both conceptually and financially, as it had done from the outset.

Her delegation paid tribute to the members of the humanitarian community who had given their lives for their beliefs and hoped that in the near future ways and means could be found of guaranteeing their safety and well-being.

Ms. AHLUWALIA (Observer for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) said that, even though members of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement had been direct targets of violence, the Movement intended to rely on strict adherence to its fundamental principles for security and to discourage the use of armed protection. States should recognize the need to maintain a clear separation between the Movement's humanitarian action and political, military or economic actions.

In view of the growing need for humanitarian assistance in a context of limited resources, the issues of effective planning, coordination and delivery of humanitarian assistance needed to be further addressed both within the United Nations system and with key partners outside the system. On the basis of its long experience, the International Federation had developed its own rules and principles for disaster relief and had co-sponsored a code of conduct for disaster relief, to which many organizations had voluntarily subscribed. That code also dealt with relationships among non-governmental organizations, Governments and the United Nations system. The International Federation took an active part in coordination efforts through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. In relation to the three key issues identified in section III.A of the report of the Secretary-General (E/1996/77), more importance should be attached to the role of competent local and national structures before, during and after crisis situations.

While the International Federation emphasized the independence of its decisions and actions, it also recognized the importance of cooperation with the United Nations system. It had worked with UNFPA and UNHCR to integrate reproductive health into refugee and emergency humanitarian assistance, and was working with UNICEF, UNHCR, WHO and other organizations on standardizing basic

humanitarian supplies and logistics. Recently, it had concluded a cooperation agreement with the Organization of African Unity. Moreover, it was addressing the issue of food security with the World Food Programme (WFP), and would pursue that dialogue at the forthcoming World Food Summit.

At its 1995 Conference, the International Federation had adopted resolutions on: the negative impact of economic sanctions on the humanitarian needs of vulnerable populations; violence against women, especially in crisis situations; and strengthening national capacity to provide humanitarian and development assistance to the most vulnerable groups. Humanitarian efforts must be reassessed, realigned and harmonized, and the Secretary-General's coordination initiatives required collective support and cooperation.

Mr. ZIMMERMANN (Observer for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that there was a disturbing dichotomy between political affirmations and actual events with regard to ensuring respect for the right of victims of armed conflict to receive protection and assistance. That right was matched by the right of humanitarian organizations to act on behalf of the populations affected. All too often, however the actions of those organizations were hampered, their staff came under attack and their supplies were looted and used for military purposes. Political leaders throughout the world must strengthen their commitment to peace in situations where political action was the sole means of resolving the issues at stake.

The coordination of humanitarian relief efforts could and must improve the effectiveness of those efforts. However, coordination mechanisms should be kept as flexible as possible and should not be excessively time-consuming, slow down the decision-making process or render cooperation more complex. Humanitarian coordination must serve the interests of the victims, with a minimum of red tape. ICRC participated actively in those efforts, seeking to develop synergies while abiding by its principle of independence.

ICRC also took preventive action, particularly by promoting knowledge of the rules of humanitarian law among the armed forces. It was concerned about the potential effects of contingency plans, especially those involving the deployment of armed forces, since they could have the adverse consequence of prompting the warring parties to develop a hostile attitude towards humanitarian organizations, thus rendering their task even more difficult and dangerous. The

international community must promote respect for humanitarian law, which kept the door open for reconciliation and the restoration of peace.

Mr. APTSIAURI (Observer for Georgia) said that the Department of Humanitarian Affairs had strengthened its coordinating role and that the mechanisms of aid supply and distribution were improving, particularly at the field level. Georgia was currently in a difficult period of economic and political transition, which was complicated further by the presence of 300,000 refugees and displaced persons in the country owing to the unresolved conflict in the region of Abkhazia. The work of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs was therefore vitally important for Georgia's most vulnerable population groups. The regional meeting with United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, donor States and the Governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, held in March 1996, had been a practical step towards improving the regional approach to international assistance.

Ms. BIGGAR (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the European Union and Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, said that he welcomed the progress noted in the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (E/1996/52 and Corr.1), particularly in the former Yugoslavia. However, he was concerned about the restrictions on freedom of movement, which hindered the work of UNHCR in the region and could have serious implications for the forthcoming elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The readiness of countries of origin to allow the return of all refugees must be one of the criteria for participation in the reconstruction and development programmes to which the European Union was a major contributor. He urged the parties to the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina to rehabilitate housing and other basic infrastructure, to remove legal and administrative obstacles to the return of refugees and displaced persons, and to cooperate fully with UNHCR. In addition, with respect to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), he urged the Governments concerned to work closely with UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in implementing the Programme of Action agreed upon at the recent Conference held in Geneva.

His delegation supported the peace efforts under way in Burundi and the confidence-building measures aimed at ending impunity and creating a credible judicial system in Rwanda. A regional conference under the joint auspices of

the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity was needed to examine and resolve the causes of the crisis in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

He called on the international community to give greater financial and material assistance to UNHCR, whose programmes urgently needed timely and adequate funding. He commended UNHCR for its coordination efforts pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56 and for its continued emphasis on developing collaborative relationships with other international, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

Mrs. MSUYA (United Republic of Tanzania) said that she welcomed the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between UNHCR and UNICEF, as well as the note submitted by UNHCR to its Executive Committee, which addressed the need to alleviate the burden placed on many developing countries by mass influxes of refugees. In some cases, the refugee population in a given area exceeded the local population; for example, the presence in Ngara, United Republic of Tanzania, of 700,000 refugees in an area inhabited by 175,000 people had placed a burden on the local population and the Government which continued to be felt long after the refugees had left.

In the Great Lakes region of Africa, the efforts of UNICEF, UNHCR and non-governmental organizations to reunite unaccompanied children with their families deserved more support. She welcomed the new policy on the environment adopted by the UNHCR Executive Committee, especially since it provided for the participation of local populations. The UNDP/UNHCR Great Lakes Initiative to address degradation of infrastructure and the environment in refugee-affected areas in the United Republic of Tanzania, Burundi and Zaire, and the international symposium on the impact of environmental factors on displacement and the latter's impact on the environment, were steps in the right direction.

She hoped that the ongoing consultations between UNHCR and the World Bank and regional development banks on the impact of refugee influxes on development needs would bear fruit. It was disturbing to note that most of the cases still considered in need of resettlement had originated in Africa. States should facilitate the return and reintegration of refugees by providing countries of origin with the development assistance and should address the question of resettlement to third countries on the basis of international burden-sharing.

With respect to the prevention of refugee flows, support for development was just as important as an effective human rights regime. She joined UNHCR in

asking the international community to redouble its efforts to address the refugee crisis by providing additional human and financial resources in the short term and by implementing preventive measures in the long term.

Mr. KOZIY (Observer for Ukraine) said there had been a recent increase in migration to Ukraine, consisting primarily of returnees and individuals who were fleeing military conflicts in their countries of origin. Greater cooperation was needed between the countries involved in order to manage those migrant flows. In that regard, his delegation had welcomed the regional conference convened in May 1996 in Geneva to discuss irregular migratory movements in the CIS and relevant neighbouring States. The preparatory process to that conference had generated common approaches to resolving migration problems and a general policy for the countries of the region to follow in managing the migratory processes and preventing mass displacements of persons. The conference's final document included a programme of action emphasizing the need for bilateral and multilateral cooperation between all countries of the region and an operational programme specifying the activities to be carried out by UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in the CIS countries during the period 1996-2000. Another section of the final document set out preventive measures to be taken in order to protect the human rights of individuals in the region, particularly those of minorities. The implementation of preventive measures required the close cooperation of UNHCR, the Centre for Human Rights and the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Mr. GARCÍA MORITÁN (Argentina) said that United Nations human rights initiatives and mechanisms should be strengthened as a preventive measure, given the link between refugee flows and human rights violations. He welcomed the efforts of UNHCR to intensify its cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, particularly in field operations, and to promote the ratification of international human rights instruments. As a country which had traditionally been a destination for refugees, Argentina was prepared to cooperate fully with UNHCR.

Mr. AL-HITTI (Observer for Iraq) said that Iraq had traditionally been a country of asylum for refugees, but that the exceptional circumstances brought about by the imposition of unjustified economic sanctions and the military campaign waged against Iraq had prompted some Iraqi citizens to flee to neighbouring countries. The continuation of the economic embargo despite Iraq's

implementation of United Nations resolutions had resulted in food shortages, deteriorating living conditions and a serious "brain drain" as qualified professionals left the country. To solve the problem of Iraqi refugees, other countries should stop interfering with the lives of the peoples in the region so that the central authorities could take steps to strengthen peace and security and to encourage the refugees to return home. The international community should study the effects of the economic sanctions on Iraq's human rights situation and economic development and should develop new machinery to mitigate those effects. Since refugee problems were closely linked to development problems, the United Nations should consider lifting or at least lightening the economic sanctions to end the mass migration they had prompted.

Mr. AKBAR (Pakistan) said that his country had been host to one of the largest groups of refugees in history, providing shelter to 3.2 million Afghan refugees, and had worked closely with UNHCR and WFP. The continuing presence of a considerable number of those refugees was a source of several problems. Any reduction or withdrawal of assistance would only intensify the economic burden already placed on his Government, which was spending a significant amount of its own resources to ensure the welfare of an estimated 1.5 to 1.6 million Afghan refugees. If outside assistance was reduced, it would be extremely difficult to keep those refugees in camps and they would risk becoming illegal immigrants. In that regard, he appreciated the efforts of UNDP, the World Bank and UNHCR, which had provided assistance in the rehabilitation of Afghan refugees.

In October 1995, WFP had discontinued its assistance to Afghan refugees in Pakistan on the ground that they had a sufficient nutritional level. In that regard, his Government believed that international assistance to Afghan refugees should continue until their repatriation was completed. Repatriation packages should be enlarged to induce Afghan refugees to return home and free transportation provided to them for repatriation, financed by UNHCR and organized by IOM. He urged non-governmental organizations to continue to provide invaluable assistance in the rehabilitation and reintegration of Afghan refugees once they returned to Afghanistan.

Mr. MALGUINOV (Russian Federation) said that the UNHCR report (E/1996/52 and Corr.1) underlined the need for countries of origin to establish the necessary conditions for the voluntary and safe return of refugees and for practical measures to ensure the rights of minorities, protect stateless persons

and eliminate discrimination against permanent resident aliens. His delegation supported the efforts of UNHCR to increase preparedness for emergency situations and promote capacity-building through coordination of the roles of the humanitarian agencies.

An integrated regional approach to the solution of the problems of refugees and forced migration was essential. To that end, a conference on the problems of refugees, returnees, displaced persons and other forms of involuntary displacement in the CIS and relevant neighbouring States had been held in Geneva in May 1996. The decisions taken at that conference provided an important instrument for the prevention of new flows of refugees and immigrants and the management of migration processes. The final document of the conference defined an overall approach to migration problems, based on respect for human rights and elimination of discrimination on the grounds of nationality, origin and citizenship. An important result of the conference had been the sympathetic approach of the international community to the problems of the CIS countries and a readiness on its part to assist in finding solutions to those problems. His Government was in the process of elaborating priority projects to reduce migration flows and hoped that the impetus of the conference would encourage other participants to support that effort.

His delegation urged other conference participants to respond favourably to the first appeal of UNHCR and IOM, launched at the end of June 1996, relating to the most urgent pilot projects of the countries of the region. The success of those projects would determine the fate of the other decisions taken at the conference. In general, his delegation shared the view that humanitarian agencies, including UNHCR, could not and should not replace crisis prevention and management efforts, but that a judicious strategy of preventive measures would significantly help to avert negative developments and stabilize the international environment.

Mr. GUBARREVICH (Belarus) said his Government was greatly concerned by the high number of refugees and illegal and legal transit migrants in his country. It had given priority in its migrant policies to adopting legislation on immigration control which ensured freedom of movement and selection of place of residence and to assisting of the integration of returnees. Increased international cooperation and assistance were prerequisites for finding solutions to the problems of refugees and migrants, and his Government had been

actively involved in the preparation of the recent conference convened in Geneva to discuss refugees in the CIS countries.

The efforts of UNHCR to prepare and train national experts and to elaborate refugee support programmes, including legal assistance, were much appreciated. His Government was interested in the establishment in Belarus, under the auspices of UNHCR, of a permanent regional centre on migration and refugee problems for the countries of Eastern Europe.

Mrs. BENNAMI (Observer for Morocco) welcomed the UNHCR report (E/1996/52 and Corr.1) but reiterated her Government's reservations regarding the number of refugees given in its paragraph 184. The figure of 165,000 refugees in Western Sahara had never been verified by UNHCR through a census. The United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) had estimated a maximum of 65,000 refugees including children. Moreover, according to various sources, that number would be significantly reduced once the conditions for the identification had been fulfilled.

Mrs. MESDOUA (Observer for Algeria) said that it was up to the identification commission to present figures on the number of refugees in Western Sahara and that the Council was not an appropriate forum in which to raise political and decolonization issues under consideration by the Security Council and the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly.

The PRESIDENT suggested that the Council should take note of the various reports submitted under item 5 (a), namely, the report of the Secretary-General on assistance for the reconstruction and development of Lebanon in document E/1996/65 and the oral reports on assistance to: Madagascar; Somalia; Yemen; refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa; and the drought-stricken areas of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, the Sudan and Uganda.

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT suggested that the Council should take note of the report submitted under item 5 (i) by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (E/1996/52 and Corr.1).

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.